

Sharpshooting on Private Properties

Frequently Asked Questions

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was first detected in southern Wisconsin in 2002. Since this discovery, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has developed a plan to manage the disease. Sharpshooting is meant to supplement, not compete with, the public harvest of deer. The success or failure of chronic wasting disease control efforts will greatly affect the future of statewide deer herd health. As a landowner, we ask for your help with CWD control efforts. The DNR believes CWD management can only be successful if landowners and hunters contribute to deer-herd reduction in affected areas. For landowners who do not hunt themselves or have others hunt their land, allowing trained DNR staff (sharpshooters) to kill deer on private lands is one way landowners can help manage deer numbers in the Disease Eradication Zone (DEZ) and in localized areas of the Herd Reduction Zone (HRZ) where positives have been detected.

Is landowner permission required? Absolutely! The Department only shoots deer on private property with landowner permission. We work closely with the landowner every step of the way.

What do you do to ensure the safety of residents and their property?

Safety is our #1 priority.

- Shooters must pass a three day intensive training course that stresses marksmanship and safety. In addition, they must complete yearly re-certification sessions.
- Shooting/safety plans are developed for each property. These are developed from aerial photographs that indicate ground cover and where buildings/houses are located. These plans make shooters aware of any potential hazards or unsafe shooting directions. Landowners provide us with potential safety issues such as livestock, which are also shown on the safety plans. Landowners can review the shooting plans, and should any concerns arise, changes can be made or the landowner can deny the shooting plan.
- Shooters are required to visit their assigned shooting site during daylight hours prior to setting up for a shooting session. They will confirm safety zones and property lines, as well as note deer travel routes to assure safety and improve efficiency in removing deer.
- For every night sharpshooting occurs, a shooting duty officer is assigned to monitor shooter activity and respond to any incidents that could occur. Sharpshooters are required to carry cell phones at all times and to contact the shooting duty officer prior to and following each shooting session.
- To date, we have had no shooting-related accidents.

Why have sharpshooters? Sharpshooting is targeted at areas where high populations of deer exist, there is little to no hunting pressure or disease prevalence is high. CWD will spread more easily in high density populations as there is a greater likelihood of uninfected deer coming in contact with infected deer. DNR sharpshooters will reduce deer numbers in 'refuges', which will help towards the goal of eradicating the disease where it exists and preventing it from spreading to other areas of the state. Shooters target antlerless deer, especially adult does, to have the most impact on reducing deer densities. A review of the age and sex composition of deer shot by sharpshooters shows 27% adult bucks, 41% adult does, 17% buck fawns, and 16% doe fawns. In comparison, deer registered by hunters included 39% adult bucks, 32% adult does, 15% buck fawns, and 14% doe fawns. Since the majority of sharpshooting occurred from January through March, most (over 75%) of the adult bucks harvested by DNR shooters had shed their antlers.

Who are the sharpshooters? Only permanent DNR employees that have been certified are allowed to be sharpshooters. This includes staff from the Law Enforcement, Wildlife Management and Parks programs. All have successfully completed training sessions and yearly re-certifications that emphasize safety and accuracy in hunting situations.

When does shooting take place? Sharpshooting typically occurs from the close of the late archery season through March. For this season, that period is January 8, 2007 through March 31, 2007. However, in some state parks and private lands where a refuge situation exists, (closed to hunting or landowner does not hunt or allow others to hunt resulting in higher deer densities) DNR shooting may take place to increase surveillance and reduce deer numbers. In these instances shooting may occur prior to the end of hunting seasons where high numbers of deer are present, there is landowner support and no public hunting occurs. In all other situations, there is no sharpshooting from April through December.

What kind of firearm is used? Sharpshooters primarily use .308 rifles. Other calibers may be used if shooters choose to use their personal rifles. Shooters must qualify in training with the firearm they will use. Some rifles are equipped with muzzle suppressors which significantly reduce noise. If landowners prefer that suppressed firearms be used, we make every effort to accommodate that request if our limited number of suppressed rifles allows. Night vision equipment is also used to allow shooters to see deer after dark, and shooting results from 2005 indicate greater efficiency in harvesting deer using the night vision technology than without.

What do sharpshooters hunt from? Options they use include ground blinds, ladder stands, tripod stands, climber stands and shooting from a stationary vehicle. Land features and safe shooting zones determine what will be used. State law authorizes staff with appropriate credentials to shoot from vehicles. In all cases shooting sight plans with approved safe shooting zones are adhered to. No deer are shot outside approved safety zones. Sharpshooting does NOT take place from moving vehicles or from helicopters. The use of helicopters is specific to population surveys, no firearms are on board and flights are not coordinated to drive deer.

How do you get the deer to come to you? Sharpshooters shoot over bait piles that are monitored weekly and restocked as needed. The use of bait is for safety and efficiency reasons, and it's strategically placed in the safest direction the sharpshooter is allowed to shoot. The use of bait is also an essential component of an effective and efficient government culling operation. Baiting is used to monitor the activity of the deer and can establish reliable, consistent deer movement patterns, which greatly increase the efficiency of killing deer. Bait is only available to deer during active shooting periods, and is removed when shooting operations terminate.

What is the incentive for the landowner? Landowner cooperation will help reduce local deer populations and move us toward our goal of a healthy deer herd.

Who gets the deer the sharpshooters shoot? As the landowner, you are welcome to keep any deer we shoot. If you do not want it, or don't know anyone who would want it, the DNR will donate the deer to a local food pantry if it tests negative for CWD.

What is the goal? The DNR's goal is a healthy deer herd. Successful CWD management in Wisconsin will require a sustained effort over many years, but aggressive management early in the program is important to contain the spread of CWD, minimize the size of the affected area and shorten the time required to eradicate the disease.

